

Stepfamily inFormation


Break the [wounds + unawareness] cycle and guard your descendents

Make a Multi-generation Family Map to See Who You All Are - p. 1 of 2

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 The Web address of this article is <http://sfhelp.org/03/geno1.htm>

Clicking links below will open a full window or an informational popup, so please turn off your browser's popup blocker or allow popups from this nonprofit Web site.

This is one of over 150 articles focused on healing psychological [wounds](#), building [high-nurtur-ance](#) family relationships, breaking the [wounds + unawareness] [cycle](#), and [preventing](#) divorce. [This introduction](#) describes the Web site's purpose and the best ways to use its resources. Each article is part of a [mosaic](#) of ideas, so the more you read, the more sense they'll all make.

These articles augment, vs. replace, other [qualified](#) professional help. The "/" in re/marriage and re/divorce notes that it may be a stepparent's first union. "Co-parents" means both bioparents, or any of the [three or more](#) related stepparents and bioparents co-managing a multi-home nuclear stepfamily.

Before continuing, reflect: why are you reading this - what do you [need](#)?

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THIS IS one of a [series](#) of articles on [Project 3](#) - co-parents' acknowledge and resolve normal stepfamily [identity](#) and [membership](#) (inclusion) conflicts. Other articles in the series review...

- what family-[identity](#) and [membership](#) conflicts are;
- why they often [stress re/marriages](#),
- options for deciding [who does belong](#) in a typical multi-home stepfamily, and...
- specific ideas on [how to resolve](#) members' conflicts over this.

This two-page article describes making and using stepfamily...

Family Maps: a Powerful Tool For Co-parents

A family map or *genogram* graphically shows all the living and dead people who genetically, emotionally, and legally comprise a family. It may include three or more generations of family members, and show where each person "fits" in the group.

With extra information and symbols, these maps can show family alliances, conflicts, relationship [cut-offs](#), and other important factors that help describe the family's [structure](#) and dynamics. Family maps can be specially helpful for new stepfamily members who wonder "Who *are* we all now?" Genograms and [structural maps](#) are useful visual tools to help understand and manage your related [stepfamily homes](#).

If you've never heard of a family map, you may wonder *why bother*? Basically, most intact biofamilies

are much simpler than typical stepfamilies, and have less need for this tool. This mapping concept can also be very helpful for people wanting to [assess their family trees](#) for symptoms of inherited psychological [wounds](#).

To start, view this [sample](#) map. [Option](#) - print and refer to it as you read the suggestions below.

How to Map Your Family

Use the following suggestions to help discover your own mapping style...

Symbol Conventions

Here are some "standard" symbols to use in making your family map. If these don't fit for you, enjoy inventing your own!

Use ~3/4" circles for females, and squares for males. Crosshatch or color these for extra-important people (important to whom?). Use *dashed* circles and squares, or slashed or "X'd" symbols, to represent dead, missing, or psychologically-detached people;

Horizontal *solid* lines show legal marriages, and *dashed* lines to show committed unmarried primary relationships, and important friendships, dependencies, hero/ines, and supporters. A horizontal line with a ----//---- or ----X---- can indicate a psychological or legal divorce;

Vertical or slanted *solid* lines show genetic connections. *Dashed* slanted lines can show adoptions, foster parents, or other special adult-child relationships. [Option](#) - use double, triple, or colored lines to indicate the importance or relative strength of the connection between two people.

Zigzag, double, or wavy lines can symbolize strong emotional, legal, financial, or other kinds of current relationship connections, including lust, grief, anger, fear, and "hatred." If helpful, add symbols like "+" and "-" to show friendship, love, hostility, and/or fear;

Draw an "X" through a circle or square to indicate *death*.

Include names, dates, pets, extra-important current friends, sponsors, or authorities, major illnesses and disabilities, addictions, arrows for child visitations, and any other symbolic or text information that adds clarity and meaning to your map.

OK, now you have some raw materials. What do you *do* with them?

Mapping Steps and Options

- **Have** each of your co-parents draw their own map of at least three generations, including genetically, financially, or psychologically influential dead people. You'll discover more if you *don't* draw your maps together! Then...
- **Explain** the map-making purpose and steps to your minor and grown kids and invite them to draw their own diagrams (alone). [Options](#) - suggest they use stick figures and/or cartoon faces to do this.
- **You** can do this exercise any time (and *often*) as your complex stepfamily [merger](#) progresses over many years. Family maps can be specially useful around major family-*change* events like weddings, births, graduations, separations and divorces, home-leavings, job or location changes, adoptions, retirements, and deaths.

1) Get Ready...

Check your initial *attitude*. Be open-minded, curious, and give yourself permission to believe "there's no right or wrong" in anyone's map. Everyone has a right to their own opinion and definitions. Avoid manipulating or demanding family members to include or exclude people, and be alert for

significant [values](#) and [loyalty](#) conflicts and relationship [triangles](#).

Expect your members' maps to disagree - that's *normal* in typical stepfamilies. Discovering such [values conflicts](#) promotes admitting and resolving important [identity](#) conflicts, and strengthening your multi-home stepfamily's [bonds](#), loyalties, and [nurturance level](#) over time.

Use a BIG piece of paper - e.g. at least two 8.5" x 11" sheets taped together. These diagrams get very complex!

Take your time! Expect evolving your family diagram to take an hour or more - perhaps over several sittings. The more undistracted focus and attention you invest in creating your map, the more you'll learn.

Consider [journaling](#) about your map-making process. The thoughts and emotions that bloom while you're making this map and discussing it with others - are just as valuable as the worth the price of admission. The map itself is *not* the objective here. The real payoffs are what you all *feel* and *learn* as you draw and [talk](#) about your maps!

If you haven't already, scan the [sample genogram](#) and return.

To avoid the frustration of having to re/draw or cramp, create your map in three stages:

- Co-parents, then...
- minor and grown kids, then...
- bio and step relatives, and other emotionally-important people. Here's how...

2) Start With Your Three or More Co-parents

Lay your paper long-side horizontal. Start in the center, about 1/3rd from the bottom edge. Use pencil to *lightly* sketch in this first three-generational draft. Novice mappers often find after 30" that their first drawings are too cramped, and they have to start over to make more room for all the symbols, notes, and other info. Give yourself *lots* of space!

Draw a ~3/4" circle or square for you, and a short horizontal solid (if married) or dashed line to another symbol for your current partner. Put your current ages inside the symbols, and next to them note the name/s you're each called now.

Next, on the same level add horizontal solid lines from your symbols to new squares and circles for each of your *co-parenting* ex mates (your stepkids' other bioparent/s), *whether alive or dead*. If you've been married several times, or had children with several adults, draw in *each* of your kids' other bioparents.

If you're divorced or widowed *without* biokids, only include your ex if they, or any of their relatives, have "significant" emotional, legal, or financial meaning to you now. If you've divorced, "X" the middle of the line connecting your symbol to your ex's - unless there's still a "significant" love/hate (or just "hate") relationship. In that case you're still psychologically bonded - a frequent major stressor in many stepfamilies!

If your former partner *died*, draw a slash or "X" through their symbol, and note the approximate date and perhaps the cause of their death.

If any co-parenting ex mate is seriously dating, [cohabiting](#), or has re/married, add horizontal lines from that ex-mate's symbol to new circles or squares for their current partner. If they've re/divorced or rejected an adult who still has emotional importance to any child of yours or your partner's, include that adult's symbol, and anyone related to them who's still emotionally important to your child (or to you).

You've just drawn the co-parents' row of your genogram. How many co-parents are there in your stepfamily so far? There should be at least three... How many homes do they live in? How do you honestly feel about including each one as a full [member](#) of your stepfamily? Take a moment to [journal](#) your [thoughts and feelings](#) without editing now for later reflection and discussion.

Take your time! Now...

3) Add All Minor and Grown Kids

Draw a ~3/4" square or circle for each *living* biochild, about 2" or 3" below their *custodial* bioparent's symbol. If the child is living on their own, draw their symbol anywhere below your co-parent row. Include circles and squares and connector lines for their spouses, kids, and/or any current key emotional partners. Put their current age inside their circle or square, and note their first name, and/or nickname/s. Add their last name, because steppeople - even in the same home - often have different last names (which can diffuse a sense of home and stepfamily "togetherness").

Now connect each biochild's symbol with solid slanted lines to the horizontal line between their bioparents. If any custodial child currently visits the home of their other bioparent regularly, add dashed horizontal arrows and dashed-line biochild symbols under the other bioparent to show this.

Next, add a symbol under the appropriate bioparent/s for each *dead* and/or *absent* (e.g. adopted) biochild (i.e. aborted, miscarried, stillborn, killed, [suicide](#)). If such an absent child is [well-grieved](#) (emotionally released) by *all* living genetic relatives, draw their symbol with dashed lines, with a slash or "X." If you feel they're [not](#) well grieved yet, make their symbol-lines solid.

If dead, put a slash or "X" through their circle or square, and write in their age at death. If the gender of an aborted child wasn't known, use a diamond as a symbol. If you haven't included a symbol for each child's other bioparent, add one for them now on or near the horizontal co-parenting row. Note the date and cause of the child's death. Each such "missing" child is usually a *psychologically*-powerful absent family member long after their death or departure.

Next, include symbols, full names, and ages for each *emotionally*-important past or current *adopted* or *foster* child, if any. Add any other relevant data you feel would be helpful about them - like birthdays, prior homes, school grade, key interests, ...

Draw separate symbols for both of their birth (bio)parents, even if they aren't currently known or actively co-parenting. They're surely of major genetic, ancestral, and psychological importance to their child, *even if the importance is repressed or denied*. Double check: look at each adult on your co-parenting row (including each co-parenting ex-mate's new or recent partner/s), and ask "*have we included each known living and dead child of theirs?*"

You've just added the "**children's row**" to your genogram. Note your feelings, and any thoughts and questions that come up. Write these down for later reflection. There's more to come! Recall: this is a *discovery* exercise - payoffs feel like "aha"s, "wow"s, and "Hmm!"s...

➡ **Next:** add the top (grandparents) row and some mapping options, and review ways to use your completed stepfamily diagram. Do you need a break before continuing?

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